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A WINDOW ON THE WORLD.

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THE STUDY OF FOREIGN, PARTICULARLY LATIN AMERICAN, CULTURE IS DISCUSSED. DANGERS OF NATIONAL PROVINCIALISM ARE STRESSED, AND SOME HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF BOTH ETHNOCENTRISM AND CULTURAL CURIOSITY ARE GIVEN. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COLONIAL CULTURES DEVELOPED IN THE AMERICAS WOULD BE ONE EFFECTIVE WAY OF INTERESTING STUDENTS IN LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "FORUM OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA," VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2, DECEMBER 1967, PAGES 4-5. (AF)

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A WINDOW ON THE WORLD*

By Lewis Hanke, University of California, Irvine

Just about half a century ago I began to study Spanish in Piqua High School in Ohio. Piqua was not a large or important town in those far-off days—nor is it today. George Washington is supposed to have slept there when it was a frontier outpost in the 18th century called Pickawillany, but otherwise nothing much seemed to have happened there. But this undistinguished town did have the Schmidlapp Free Public Library where the world of books first became a reality for me, and above all there was an excellent teacher of Spanish who not only initiated us in the mysteries and delights of this remarkable language but who also saw to it that we knew something of the culture and the life of Spanish-speaking countries. It was this high school teacher who first stimulated me to look over the wall separating this small Ohio town from the outside world, and to become interested in the language and the civilization of Spain and Spanish America. And when I happened upon Harry Franck's **Four Months Afoot in Spain** in the Public Library, I knew that life would not be complete until I had learned more, by personal inspection, about the magic world created by Spaniards in the Old World and the New.

Further study at Northwestern University of Spanish literature and of Latin American history under that pioneer in the field, Professor I. J. Cox, served only to confirm me in my desire to learn more about this culture which was so different in many ways from the culture of Piqua, Ohio.

Role of the Study of Latin American Culture in our Schools

In June, 1926, I gave my first class on Latin American History—a feeble effort I was allowed to make at the 1926 Summer Session of the University of Chicago. Ever since then, in the midst of the booms and the busts that have characterized the development of Latin American studies in this country, I have pondered the role of the study of Latin American culture in our schools. One conviction that has been developed and strengthened through the years is the increased importance for Americans of the study of other cultures since I first was fortunate enough to start Spanish under an inspired teacher in Piqua High School.

Bernard Moses, who offered the first university course in Latin American history in the U.S.—in 1895 at Berkeley—expressed well the basic reason for Americans to study other cultures in his notable address in Los Angeles in 1898 before the Southern California Teacher's Association. Professor Moses spoke on the topic "The Neglected Half of American History"; he urged that we study the history of the whole American continent, "to prevent us from failing into what we may call a national provincialism . . . To check the tendency to narrowness and provincialism is one of the most important tasks devolving upon the schools, and in this undertaking the teachers of history may exert a large measure of influence." And Professor Moses was bold indeed, for at a time when the Spanish American war was imminent he urged his listeners in Los Angeles "to devote a portion of their energies to a consideration of the social and political achievements of our prospective enemy."

Let us admit that all peoples naturally tend to emphasize their own civilization, their own achievements, and are usually convinced that their own ways of doing things are the best.

The influence of cultural nationalism has never been stated more clearly than by Herodotus, the Father of History. Herodotus, after visiting the Egyptians, concluded that they were a puzzling people. Women went to market in Egypt while the men remained at home to weave. Just the opposite occurred in Greece. And, most strange, the Egyptians wrote from rights to left. He noted, however, the surprise of the Egyptians at his observations concerning their writing habits. It was not they who were strange, the Egyptians maintained, who wrote from right to left, but the Greeks, who wrote from left to right.[1] This kind of ethnocentrism thus has existed for a long time and one should not be surprised to find it a powerful force today from Maine to Patagonia. All students, therefore, need to have "windows on the world" opened up for them to allow them to learn about other people, other cultures, and other points of view. Howard Mumford Jones in a recent provocative report on "Uses of the Past in General Education" describes this situation as a need for what he calls "de-education" and "re-education". As he explains it:

"By de-education I mean the ability to get outside one's own culture pattern, and by re-education I mean cultivating the capacity to accept some simpler culture at its face value, not to look down on it."[2]

Many Windows on the World

Of course it doesn't have to be necessarily a simpler culture; one might very well study a sophisticated culture. The possibilities are numerous—Russian culture, Latin American culture, Arabic culture, etc. There are many "windows on the world" for our students to look through. Our 20th-century American—thanks to the growth of area studies since World War II—has a wealth of material to draw upon. Moreover, the spirit of our age seems to be more favorable than any time since the sixteenth century toward the study of other cultures. For the interest of a people, of a nation, in the culture of other peoples is a relatively recent phenomenon and far from universal even today. So far as I know it was the Spanish missionaries who went to America in the wake of Columbus who first displayed a lively interest in another culture than their own. Medieval travellers did report on the strange customs they encountered, but with the Spanish missionaries there was an organized effort for specific objectives. A priest who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage first studied the Indian languages he found on the island of Hispaniola, and soon there developed a remarkable drive among the early friars to learn to speak the many languages of America, in order to convert the Indians. But some Spaniards studied Indian cultures partly because their curiosity was aroused, such as the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagun, the first anthropologist in America.[3]

Availability of Latin American Civilization

Latin American civilization has certain obvious advantages which make it an unusually valuable, and available, "window on the world." Spanish and Portuguese are relatively easy languages—at least in comparison with Arabic, Hindi, or Russian—and Spanish is more widely taught in our colleges today than any other. To study a culture, a knowledge of the language is certainly highly desirable; thus Latin American civilization enjoys the advantage of offering no great linguistic barrier to students. Again, many Latin Americans live in the United States and their presence—increasingly felt in cities far beyond New York and Los Angeles—also helps to make possible learning about their culture. Moreover, Latin America as a travel area is open—except for Cuba—and 1.5 million American tourists visit Mexico every year, which helps powerfully to explain her economic stability. Thus students who read about Latin American civilization in class may also know a Latin American, or visit some part of that large and varied area which includes primitive tribes, sophisticated urbanites, ancient archaeological sites, exciting modern architecture, painting, music, and literature. Therefore if we are agreed that American high school and college students would benefit from an exposure to another culture as a part of

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*Address delivered at the Fifth Biennial Conference of the California Council of Foreign Language Teachers Association at the International Hotel on November 5, 1967.

their fundamental education, the study of Latin American civilization offers many advantages for both the students and the professors, who will have to learn how to teach Latin American civilizations.

How Do We Present Latin American Civilization to our Students?

This brings me to my next point. How can the civilization of more than 200 million people to the south of the Rio Grande be presented most effectively to our students?

My answer is a simple one. Latin American civilization should be looked upon not as a "crisis" subject, but as the unfolding story of a culture, a civilization both interesting and worthy of study. It is natural that the coming of Castro, the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the missile crisis, and U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic should stir our students to an increased awareness of Latin American affairs, but a "current events" approach in which attention focuses on transitory dictators, military juntas, economic crisis will not, I am convinced, provide the kind of course required by the nature of the world in which we live and by the place of the United States in the present and foreseeable world.

What should be included in a course —perhaps to be called "A History of Latin American Civilization"? Much more on the art, literature, and philosophy of the people of Latin America from pre-Columbian times to the present; much less on the rather dull political events that clutter up many of our presentations. For, contrary to the newspaper presentation of Latin America, this vast area is much more than a festering mass of economic discontent and political turmoil. One need not be a pollyanna to see that much more is to be found there. This may shock some who feel that the only true history is "contemporary" history and that anything that happened before 1900 should be studied today only if it can be shown that today's problems had their roots in that far-off age. As Howard Mumford Jones wrote:

"The past is not the present. On the contrary, the past is significantly different from the present—that is why it can be useful to us, and that is why it has meaning and imaginative charm. General education is impoverished when we neglect this central truth in an anxiety to prepare everybody for today's world . . . difference enriches: likeness palls."[4]

The presentation of a course on Latin American civilization is much more possible of achievement now because many of our younger scholars have been able to live and work in Latin America, thanks to fellowship grants from the government and foundations. Even though there is altogether too much emphasis on recent events—as though the last few weeks or months or years were always the most significant — and on studying revolutions, still the fellowship holders learn a lot about Latin American life that is not usually included in their doctoral dissertations. On their return, these well-prepared younger scholars are bound to try to incorporate in their teaching and in their research what they have absorbed in Latin America. They are finding out how relatively backward we are in teaching about Latin America at any level, when compared with the teaching of U.S. history or European history; one need only look at the materials available for instruction. Maps, paperbacks, textbooks, collections of readings, "problems" books—none of the instruments for teaching Latin American civilization seem to me to be comparable in quality or in variety to what students take for granted in the study of other civilizations. Part of this cultural lag is undoubtedly due to the fact that more students take these other courses, so that a much larger market exists than for teaching materials on Latin America. But it is also true that we simply have not devoted enough energy or imagination to the task.

The Comparative Approach— A way to Challenge and Interest

One obvious way to present a course on Latin American Civilization in such a way as to challenge and interest our students would be to use the comparative approach. I do not mean comparison with Africa, Asia, or any other underdeveloped area outside the hemisphere, though such an approach might be useful under some circumstances. But the American hemisphere has been and still is a kind of "social laboratory" in which experiments have been tried out in many fields, and we should be willing to use this experience for educational purposes. For Frenchmen, Englishmen, Spaniards, Portuguese, and many other people have participated in the exploration and colonization of the Americas but we have not yet adequately incorporated this historical experience into our teaching of history at any level. Our students learn about Columbus and his brave companions in the first chapter of all the textbooks on U.S. history, and then the textbook usually turns to discuss the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving. If there is any additional information given, it is likely to be a reference to the destruction of the noble Indians by the cruel Spaniards. Why could not our courses on Latin American Civilization incorporate some material comparing what went on in the Spanish and Portuguese empires with what occurred under British and French rule? I am not proposing a history of the Americas — though separate courses with this orientation might be developed for advanced students in colleges—but rather the recognition of the fact that different types of colonial cultures developed in the Americas, and that most students would already have some knowledge about the British and French experience in the New World to serve them as background. In unrolling the history of Latin American Civilization, we should make use of this knowledge by drawing comparisons—when possible and when appropriate—with Spanish and Portuguese experience in such fields as Economics, Education, Land, Religion, Science, and Slavery.

The incorporation of these and other similar topics into a carefully organized course on Latin American civilization, the preparation of interesting teaching materials on these and other topics; and the training of teachers to plan and direct such courses will require careful consideration. It is encouraging to learn, therefore, that a part of our program this morning will be devoted to panel discussions by teachers on what should be done. For Bernard Moses proclaimed to the teachers of California here in Los Angeles in 1898 that they are the principal opponents of that kind of cultural nationalism which leads to provincialism and to arrogance; a truth which I became aware of half a century ago in a Spanish class in Piqua High School in Ohio. Only as teachers become convinced of the importance of the study of other cultures will Americans have the kind of education they need to confront the difficult times in which we live. But if we do use our tremendous resources wisely enough, our Latin American studies will be more varied, more interesting, and more significant in our national education than ever before.

1 Cesar Graña, "Cultural Nationalism: The Idea of Historical Destiny in Spanish America," **Social Research,** XXIX (Winter, 1962), 396.

2 Jones, "Uses of the Past in General Education," **Harvard Educational Review** (Winter, 1966), p. 7.

3 See the author's "The Dawn of Conscience in America: Spanish Experiments and Experiences with the Indians in the New World," **Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,** Vol. 107, no. 2 (1963), 83-92.

4 Jones, "Uses of the Past in General Education," pp. 10-11.

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